

EARLY AND LATE, OR HORAE GRATIAE NO. 664

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 10, 1865,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder,
which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard...
And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace...
Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour
he went out, and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why stand you here all the day idle?’”
Matthew 20:1, 3, 5-6.*

WE have frequently observed that we do not think it right to neglect the connection of Scripture. We have no right to tear passages of Scripture from their context, and make them to mean what they were not intended to teach. And therefore I have in the reading given you, according to my ability, what I think to be the immediate design of the present parable. It is a rebuke to those who fall into a legal spirit and begin calculating as to what their reward ought to be in a kingdom where the legal spirit is entirely out of place, since its reward is not of debt but of grace.

I think I may now, without any violation of propriety, dwell upon one very distinct fact in connection with the parable. It is not right to violate the drift of the parable, but having already observed it, and made it as clear as we can, we believe that we are now authorized to make use of one of the main circumstances mentioned in it.

This morning I intend to call your attention to the fact that the laborers were hired at different periods of the day, by which doubtless we are taught that God sends His servants into His vineyard at different times and seasons. That some are called in early youth, and others are not led to enter into the service of the Master until declining years have brought them almost to the eventide of life.

I must, however, ask you to remember that *they were all called*—by the mention of which the Savior would teach us that no man comes into the kingdom of heaven of himself. Without exception, every laborer for Jesus has been called in one sense or another, and he would not have come without being so called. They are all called. Were a man what he should be, he would need no pressing and invitation to come to the Gospel of Christ. But since human nature is perverted, and men put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, darkness for light, and light for darkness, man needs to be called by the outward word. He needs to be invited, persuaded, and entreated. He needs, to use the strong expression of the apostle Paul, that as though God did beseech him by us, we should pray him in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God.

Nay, further than this, although some men come to work in a legal spirit in the vineyard through this common call of the Gospel, yet no man in spirit and in truth comes to Christ without a further call, namely, the effectual call of God’s Holy Spirit. The general call is given by the minister, it is all that he can give. If the preacher attempts to give the particular call as some of my hyper-calvinistic brethren do, confining the Gospel command to a certain character and trying to be themselves the discoverers of God’s elect, and to make that particular which is always universal. If the preacher acts thus and virtually endeavors to give the particular call, he makes a sorry mess of it, and usually fails altogether to preach the Gospel of glad tidings to the sons of men.

But when man is content to do what he can do, namely, preach the commandment, “that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and that, “God commands all men everywhere to repent,” then there comes with the general call to the chosen of God, a particular and special call which none but the Holy Ghost

can give, but which He gives so effectually that all who hear it become willing in the day of God's power, and turn with full purpose of heart unto the Lord. In what sense is it true that many are called, but few chosen, if none are to be called by the preaching of the Word but those who are chosen? There are two callings, the one is general to all who hear of Jesus, and many who are thus called are not chosen. The other is personal and peculiar to the elect, "for whom he did predestinate them he also called."

To return to our point. All in the vineyard are in some sense called. There is not a solitary exception to this rule in the entire Christian church. The doctrine of freewill has not a single specimen to show to prove itself. There is not a sheep in all the flock that came back to the shepherd unsought. There is not a single piece of money which leaped again into the woman's purse, she swept the house to find it. Nay, I will go further and say there is not even a single prodigal son in the entire family who did ever say, "I will arise and go unto my Father," till first the Father's grace, veiling itself in the afflicting providence of a mighty famine, had taught the prodigal the miserable results of sin, as he fed the swine, and gladly would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, but could not do so.

I want you to notice another fact before I come to the subject now in hand, and that is, that *all those who are called are said to have been hired*. Of course in a parable no word is to be construed harshly. We are to give the meaning according to the drift, but still I think we may say that there is this likeness between hiring a servant and the engagement of a soul to Christ—that henceforth a man hired has no right to serve another, he serves the master who has hired him.

When a soul is called by grace into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, he cries, "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over me, but now You only will I serve." He plucks off the yoke of sin, its pleasure, its custom, and he puts upon him that yoke of which the Master says it is easy, and he bears that burden which Jesus tells us is light. A hired servant must not work for another, he works for his master. And so a man who is called by grace lives not for any sinister objective or motive, but for his Master only.

A hired servant, again, does not work on his own account, he is not his own master. And "you are not your own, you are bought with a price." Henceforth, though he calls no man "Master" on earth, yet he remembers that one is his Master in heaven, to whom all his service is due. There is a compact between the hired man and his master, and there is a solemn compact of spirit between the true believer and his Lord. We have devoted ourselves to His service. We have given up all liberty of self-will, and henceforth our will is at the government of our Lord, and all our powers and passions are to be, we hope will be, through God's grace, obedient to Him who has hired us into the vineyard.

Now the word "hired" was used in order to bring in the idea of reward. It was used to suit Peter's view of the case. It was used in order that his legal question of, "What shall we have therefore?" might be clearly brought out, and its folly shown in the light of that sovereign grace which does as it wills with His own. Yet for all that believers are hired in an evangelical sense—they do not serve God for nought—they shall not work without a reward. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." We shall have our reward for what we do for the Master, and though it is not wages in the sense of debt, yet verily I say unto you there shall not be a single true-hearted worker for God who shall not receive of his Master most blessed wages of grace in the day when He comes to take account of His servants.

Now to the point—*the master calls these hired servants of his at different hours of the day*. And in the second place, *distinguishing grace shines forth in each case*, and is illustrated and made more manifest in its varieties of glorious compassion and lovingkindness by the different hours at which the chosen ones are called.

I. ALL ARE NOT CALLED BY GRACE AT THE SAME TIME. Some, according to the parable, are called *early in the morning*. Thrice happy are these! The earliest period at which a child may be called by grace would be difficult for us positively to define, because children are not all the same age mentally when they are of the same age physically, and even in the matter of mental development we dare not limit the Holy One of Israel as to the chosen period of operation.

As far as our observation goes, grace works upon some little ones at the very dawn of moral consciousness. There are, no doubt, precocious children whose intellect and affections are very much developed, and very deeply sanctified even as early as two or three years of age. Such children usually are intended by the Master to be taken home at once. There are interesting biographies extant, which prove that holiness may bloom and ripen in the youngest heart, and many anecdotes are treasured up in such collections as *Janeway's Token for Children*, of children whom I might call infants with strict propriety, out of whose mouth God ordained praise and did, through them, quiet the enemy and the avenger.

Little prattlers, whose tongues it would have been supposed could only have talked of toys, have been able to speak with an apparent profundity of knowledge of spiritual, and especially of heavenly things. It is certain that some have wrought their day's work for the Master in their mother's arms. They have spoken of the Savior in tones which have melted a mother's heart and gone to a father's conscience, and then they have been taken home. "Whom the gods love die young," said the heathen, and doubtless it is no small privilege to be so soon admitted into glory. Only shown on earth, and then snatched away to heaven, too precious to be left below. Precious child, how dear were you to the good God who sent you here and then took you home! Fair rose bud! yet in the perfection of your young beauty taken to be worn by the Savior on His bosom, how can we mourn your translation to the skies?

*"No bitter tears for thee be shed,
Blossom of being seen and gone!
With flowers alone we strew thy bed,
O blest departed one!
Whose all of life, a rosy ray,
Blush'd into dawn and pass'd away."*

"Early in the morning," would also include those who have passed the first hour of the day, but who have not yet wasted the second opening hour. I mean those hopeful lads and girls who perhaps would rather I should call them youths—those who have reached their teens, have overleaped infancy and childhood, and are growing up in the heyday and vigor of youth. Youngsters still more at home in the playground than in the work field—fitter, as Satan tells them, to be sporting in the marketplace than busy in the vineyard. Such as these, to the praise of divine love, are often hired by the landowner.

It is worthwhile to warn some of our brethren who seem to be exceedingly dubious of boyish and girlish piety—to warn them against indulging harsh and suspicious doubts. We have remarked, and I think those who have watched our membership carefully will have remarked it too, that among all the slips and falls which have caused us sorrow, we have had but little sorrow from those who were added to us as boys and girls. There are those preaching the Gospel this day with acceptance and power whom these hands baptized into Jesus Christ very early in their boyhood, and there are among us honored servants of God who have served this church well, who, while they were yet at school, were joyful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With our earliest gettings some of us got an understanding of the things of the kingdom. Our Bible was our child's primer, our spelling book, the guide of our youth, and the joy of our earliest years. We thank God that there are Timothys still among us, and those not few and far between. And young Samuels, who, being brought as infants to the Lord's house, have from that day forth worn the linen ephod and served after their fashion as priests unto God, serving Him with all their hearts. Happy those who are called early in the morning! They have peculiar reasons for blessing and praising God—

*"Grace is a plant, where'er it grows,
Of pure and heavenly root.
But fairest in the youngest shows,
And yields the sweetest fruit."*

Let us spend a minute in thinking of their happy case who are saved in boyhood. Early in the morning the dew still twinkles on the leaves, the maiden blush of dawn remains and reveals an opening beauty, which is lost to those who rise not to see the birth of day. There is a beauty about early piety which is indescribably charming and unutterably lovely in freshness and radiance. We remark in childhood an artless simplicity, a child-like confidence, which is seen nowhere else. There may be less of knowing, but there is more of loving. There may be less of reasoning, but there is more of simply believing upon the authority of revelation. There may be less of deep-rootedness, but there is certainly more of perfume, beauty, and emerald verdure.

If I must choose that part of the Christian life in which there is the most joy, next to the land Beulah, which I must set first and foremost by reason of its lying so near to Canaan, I think I would prefer that tract of Christian experience which lies toward the sun-rising, which is sown with orient pearls of love, and cheered with the delicious music of the birds of hope.

Early in the morning, when we have just risen from slumber, work is easy. Our occupation in the vineyard is a cheerful exercise rather than a toil such as those find it who bear the burden and heat of the day. The young Christian is not oppressed with the cares and troubles of the world as others are—he has nothing else to do but to serve his God. He is free from the embarrassments which surround so many of us, and prevent our doing good when we would consecrate ourselves wholly to it.

The lad has nothing to think of but his Lord. There are his books and his lessons, but he can be fervent of spirit in the midst of them. There are the companions of his childhood, but in guilelessness and simplicity he may be of service to them and to God through them. Give me, I say, if I would have an auspicious time to work for Jesus, give me the blessed morning hours when my heart is bounding lightest and joy's pure sunbeams tremble on my path. When my glowing breast lacks no ardor, and my happy spirit wears no chain of care.

One would prefer early conversion because such persons have not learned to stand idle in the marketplace. A fellow, you know, who has been for hours standing with his hands in his pocket, talking with drunken men and so on, is not worth much at the eleventh hour, nay, even by the middle of the day it has become so natural to him to prop the walls, that he is not likely to take to work very readily. Begin early with your souls. Break in the colts while they are young, and they are likely to take well to the collar. There are no workers like those who commenced work while they were yet children.

What a promise of a long day there is for young believers. The sun has just risen, and he has to travel to his zenith and to descend again. There is ample room and time enough, though none to spare. If God in His providence permit it so to happen, that youngster yonder has twelve hours' work before him—what may he not accomplish? For a grand and glorious life, early piety, if not essential, is certainly a very great advantage.

To give those first days to Jesus will spare us many sad regrets, prevent us acquiring many evil habits, and enable us to achieve good success through the Holy Spirit's blessing. It is well to begin to fly while yet the wings are strong, for if we live long in sin the wing may be broken and then they will flap wearily through the rest of our days, even when grace shall call us. Let it be the desire of parents here to have their children converted as children!

And oh! may God cast that desire into the hearts of some of you young people that are here this morning that before you reach one-and-twenty, before you are called men, you may be perfect men in Christ Jesus, that while you are yet children you may be children of God. May you, as "newborn babes receive the sincere milk of the word," and the Lord grant that you may "grow thereby." Happy, happy, happy souls, whom the Master thus by distinguishing grace brings "early in the morning!"

The landowner went out again *at the third hour*. This may represent the period in which we have mounted above being children and youths, and are entitled to be called men. Suppose we settle the first hour as extending over the earliest seven or eight years of age. Then the second hour runs on from that to twenty-one or thereabouts. And then we have a good length of time between twenty and thirty and onwards to reckon as the third, and fourth, and fifth hours.

There are some whom divine grace renews at the third hour. This is late! One-and-twenty is grievously late, when you consider how much of early joy is now impossible, how much of sinful habit has now been acquired, how many opportunities for usefulness are now gone past recall. A quarter of the day has flown away forever when we reach the third hour. It is the best quarter of the day, too, that has gone past recall.

The first meal of the day is over—that blessed breaking of the fast with Christ is no more possible. A very precious meal is that, when the Savior gives us the morning portion, the manna which melts when the sun is up. Blessed is the child's feeding upon Jesus—truly, I remember when I was awakened like Elijah from under the juniper tree, and fed on such dainty fare that to this day the flavor abides with me. The man of one-and-twenty has lost that first meal, breakfast is all over. Christ will say to him as He will to some others, "Come and dine," and that is precious. But the daintiest meal is over, the first early enjoyment, the first early rapture can never be known.

I have no doubt there are many here who think that to be converted at one-and-twenty is very soon. But why one-and-twenty years given to Satan? Why a fourth of man's existence devoted to evil? Besides, it may not be a fourth, it may be one half, nay, in how many cases it is the whole of life. The sun goes down ere it is yet noon, and the idler in the marketplace has no hope of ever being a worker in the vineyard. Death, who comes when God wills and gives us no notice, may cut down the flower before it has fully opened. "In the morning it is like grass that grows up, in the evening it is cut down and withers." It is late, it is sadly late!

It is a sad thing to have lost those bright days in which the mind was least engaged, in which it was the most susceptible of forming godly habits. It is a sad thing to have learned so much of sin as one may have learned by one-and-twenty, a sad thing to have seen so much of iniquity, to have treasured up in one's memory so much defilement. Twenty years with God. One might have been in such a time a good scholar in the kingdom. But twenty years in the world one begins to be like scarlet that has been lying in the dye till it is stained through and through.

It is late, but we thank God that it is not too late. No, it is not too late even for the grandest of purposes. Not only is this period of life not too late for salvation, but it is not too late to do much for Jesus Christ. Some of us, when we were twenty-one, had finished five years of Christian ministry, and had been the means of bringing many souls to the cross of Christ. But if others are led by grace to begin then, why there is a good period still remaining if God in providence spares our lives. The young man is now in all his strength and vigor, his bones are full of marrow, and his heart is full of fire. He ought to have acquired a good degree of education, and be prepared to acquire more.

Now he is just in the time when he should work. His plans of life are not settled as yet. He is not married yet, probably. As yet there are no children about him to have been injured by his ill example. He has an opportunity of rearing up a household in the fear of God. He is commencing business, he has an opportunity of so conducting that business that there may never need to be a time when he shall have to tack about and steer another course. He may, if called by God's grace at one-and-twenty, begin an honorable career, in which there need not be an angle or a curve, but straight to the harbor's mouth he may steer and mark upon the sea of life one shining furrow which shall reach in a direct line from the present moment straight to the lights of heaven, which He will reach with his sail full and a priceless cargo on board to the praise of the glory of divine grace. It is late, it is very late in some respects, but oh! it is not too late to serve the Master well, and to win a crown of great reward, the gift of love divine.

There is abundance of work to do for us who are in this third, fourth, and fifth hour of the day. In fact, I suppose the church must look to us for its most active work. After this period and the next, a man frequently becomes rather a recipient from the church than a donor to it in the matter of activity. Its fresh blood, its energy, its warmth of heart, its ready action, must to a great extent come from the young men who are converted. Oh, you of one-and-twenty, I would to God that you were all born from heaven! You maidens, in your early beauty may the Master in His infinite mercy bring you in!

Oh, could you know the sweetness of His love, you would not need persuading! Could you understand the joy of true religion, you would not want entreating! There is more hallowed mirth enjoyed in secret with the Lord Jesus Christ, than in all the merriment the world can yield. One ounce of Christ's love is better than a ton of the world's flatteries. The world offers bubbles with fair hues, bright to look upon, but vanishing at a breath. But Christ gives real treasure, enduring as eternity. The world's gold is all base money—it glitters, but it is not precious. There may be less glitter about the things of God, but there is a “solid joy and lasting pleasure,” which “none but Zion's children know.” May the Master come this morning to your hearts, and by my simple words may He call you at the third hour of the day into the vineyard.

The landowner's kindness was not exhausted, and therefore *he went out at the sixth hour*. We find him going into the market at high noon. Half the day was over. Who is going to employ a man and give him a whole day's wages when twelve o'clock has come? He will not do too much if you hire him at six—what will he do if you engage him at twelve? Half a day's work! That is a poor thing to seek or to offer. The Master, however, seeks and accepts it. He promises, “Whatsoever is right, I will give you.”

And there are some found who at the sixth hour enter into the vineyard and being saved by grace, begin their work for Jesus. This may represent the period of life in which man is supposed to be in his prime—when he is past forty and onward. *This is sadly late, very sadly late*. Sadly late in a great many respects, not only because there is so little time left, but because so very much of energy, and zeal, and force, which should have been given to God, has been wasted, and has to some extent been used to fight against God. Forty years of hardness of heart! That is a long time for divine patience. Forty years of sin! That is a long season for conscience to mourn over.

“Forty years long was I grieved with this generation,” said God. In the wilderness they hardened their hearts all that time, and He swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest. What a blessing for you of forty and unconverted, that He has not sworn so terrible an oath concerning you—that still His long-suffering lingers, still His patience bears with you, still does He say to you, “Go, work, My son—go work this day in My vineyard.”

It is sadly late, because it has become so more than natural to you to walk in the way of sin. You will have so much to contend with in the future, as the result of the past. Putting the ship of the soul about is not such easy work as turning a vessel by her helm—only a divine hand can steer a soul upon the tack of grace. You will need much grace to conquer those corruptions which have had forty years to take root in you. You have a tenant in your house who is in possession, and you will find that possession to be nine points of the law. It will be a hard ejectment for you to effect, so hard indeed, that only a “stronger than he” can cast him out.

To your dying day the recollection of evil things which you heard during these forty years of unregeneracy will stick by you. You will hear the echoes of an old song just when you are trying to pray, and some deed which you regret and mourn over, will come to check you just when you are about to say, “Abba, Father,” with an unstammering tongue. It is late, it is very, very late, this sixth hour, *but it is not too late*. It is not too late for some of the richest enjoyments—you can yet dine with Jesus. He can yet manifest Himself to you as He does not to the world. You can have yet much time to serve Him in. It is not too late yet to be distinguished among His servants.

Take John Newton's life. He was called in the middle of the day, but John Newton left his mark in God's vineyard, a mark that will never be forgotten. I suppose Paul could not have been much less than of that age when he was called by sovereign grace. Nay, the most of the apostles were probably very little short of this age when mercy met with them. Still they did a glorious day's work.

If saved by grace in middle life, my brother, you must work harder, you must let the time past suffice you to have wrought the will of the flesh, and now you must redeem the time, because the days are evil. Why, a man converted at forty should go double quick march to heaven—there should not be a moment lost now. Work the engine at high pressure, and give two strokes for every one that might be given by

younger men and younger minds. Seek, in divine Strength, to do twice as much in the time, since you have only half the time to do a life's work.

Crowns for Christ, I know you wish to win. Then be up and doing, beloved. You are saved by grace and by grace alone. You pant to honor Christ, because of His free love to you—cannot you endeavor to honor Him as much in the remnant which remains as others do in the whole length of their life? You may, by zeal, and prudence, and discretion, and perfect consecration, yet serve the Master well.

The landowner *went out at the ninth hour*, at three o'clock in the afternoon. Nobody thinks of engaging day-laborers at three o'clock in the afternoon. A day's work to be done from three till six! It shows you that this Gospel hiring is nothing like a legal hiring. It must be all of grace, or a man would not think of doing such a thing.

Well now, three o'clock in the afternoon, that is from sixty to seventy. The prime of life has gone. *It is late, it is sadly late, very sadly late.* It is late because all the powers of the man are now weak. His memory begins to fail. He thinks his judgment better than ever it was, but probably that is only his own opinion. Most of the faculties lose their edge in old age. He has acquired experience, but still there is no fool like an old fool. And a man who has not been taught by divine grace learns very little of any value in the school of providence. Sixty thousand years would not make a man wise if grace did not teach him.

Now think of it, is it not late? Here is the man—if he be converted now, what is there left of him? He is just a candle end. He may give a little light, but it is almost like a snuff burning in the socket. All those sixty years, seventy years have been spent—where? cover it all up. Let us go backward as Noah's sons did, and cover it all up, and oh, may Almighty grace cover it too! The fact is terribly appalling—sixty, seventy years spent in the service of Satan. Oh what good the man might have done! Had he but served his God as he served the world, what good he might have done!

He has made a fortune, has he! How rich he might have been in faith by this time. He has built a house! Yes, but how he might have helped to build the church. The man has been playing at card-houses. He has been like boys by the seashore building castles of sand, which must all come down, and must come down very soon too, for I hear the surges of the dread tide of death—it is rolling in even now. Those teeth which have fallen out, those pains and his rheumatics, and so on, all show that this is not his rest. The tabernacle is beginning to crumble about the man, and the warning is loud which reminds him that he must soon be gone, and leave his wealth and his house.

And so, if this be all, in the end it will turn out that he has done nothing—he has piled up shadows, heaped together thick clay, and that is all he has done—when he might, if he had believed in Jesus, have done so much for God and for the souls of men. What evil habits he has acquired! What can you ever make of this man? If he be saved, it will be so as by fire. He is called, and he shall enter heaven, but oh! how little can he do for the Master, and what strong corruptions will he have to wrestle with, and what an inward conflict even till he gets to heaven! It is late, it is very late, but oh! blessed be God. *It is not too late.*

We have had within these walls persons who have long passed the prime of their days, who have come forward and said, "We will cast in our lot with you because the Lord is with you." We have heard their joyous story of how the old man has become a babe, and how he who was hoary with years has been born again into the kingdom of Christ. It is not too late.

Did the devil say so? The gate is shutting—I can hear it grating on the hinges, but it is not shut! The sun is going down, but he is not lost beneath the horizon yet. And if the Master calls you, only run faster because it is so. And when you are saved, serve Him with all your might and main, because you have so little time to glorify Him here on earth, and short space in which to show your sense of deep indebtedness to His surpassing love.

The day is nearly over, *it has come to the eleventh hour*, five o'clock! The men have been looking at their watches to see whether it will not soon be six. They are longing to hear the clock strike. They hope the day's work will soon close. See, the Master goes out into the marketplace among those hulking

fellows who are still loitering there, and he pitches upon some, and asks them, “Why stand you here all the day idle? Go and work! and whatsoever is right I will give you.”

At the eleventh hour they come in—half-ashamed to come I will be bound—hardly liking the others to see them. Ashamed to begin work so late. Still they did steal in somewhere. And there were generous laborers who looked over the tops of the vines, and said to them, “Glad to see you, friends! Glad to see you, however late.” There were a few, I dare say, among the laborers, at least there are if this be the vineyard, who would even stop their work, and begin to sing and praise God to think that their fellows had been brought in at the eleventh hour.

Now the eleventh hour must be looked upon as any period of life which is past threescore years and ten. How late it may extend I cannot tell. There is an authentic instance of a man converted to God at the age of a hundred and four, during the last Irish revival, who walked some distance to make a confession of his faith in Jesus Christ. And I recollect a case of one converted in America by a sermon which he had heard, I think, eighty-one years previously. He was fifteen when he heard Mr. Flavell at the end of a discourse, instead of pronouncing the blessing, say, “I cannot bless you. How can I bless those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ? ‘If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.’” And eighty-one years or more afterwards, that solemn sentence came to the man’s recollection when he was living in America, and God blessed it to his conversion.

There have been some to whom the eleventh hour has been the very hour of death. Some, I say, how many or how few is not for me to know. There is one instance we know in Scripture, it was the dying thief. There is but one. God, however, in His abundant mercy can do as He wills to the praise of the glory of His grace, and at the eleventh hour He can call His chosen. It is very late, it is very very, very late, it is sorrowfully late, *it is dolefully late, but it is not too late*, and if the Master calls you, come—though a hundred years of sin should make your feet heavy to you, so that your steps are painfully limping. If He calls you it is late but not too late, and therefore come.

Have you ever thought of how the thief worked for his Lord? It was not a fine place for working, hanging on a cross dying, just at the eleventh hour, but he did a deal of work in the few minutes. Observe what he did. First, he confessed Christ—he acknowledged Him to be Lord, confessed Him before men. In the second place, he justified Christ—“This man has done nothing amiss.” In the next place he worshipped the Lord Jesus, calling Him “Lord.” He even began to preach, for he rebuked his fellow sinner. He told him that he should not revile one who was so unrighteously condemned. He offered a petition which has become a very model of prayer—“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

At any rate, I wish I could say of myself what I can say of the thief—*he did all he could*. I cannot say that of myself. I am afraid I cannot say it of any of you. I do not know anything the thief could have done on the cross which he did not do. As soon as ever he was called, he seems to have worked in the vineyard to the utmost extent of his ability. And so let me say to you, if you should be called at the eleventh hour, my dear hearer, though you are well stricken in years and aged, yet for Jesus Christ’s sake out of great love for all the great things which He has done for you, go your way and praise Him with all your might.

II. My time has gone, and I wanted to have shown that **DISTINGUISHING GRACE SHONE RESPLENDENTLY IN EVERY INSTANCE.**

Those called in the early morning have delightful reason for admiring sovereign grace, for they are spared the ills and sins of life. I must content myself, however, by repeating concerning them the lines of Ralph Erskine.

*“In heavenly choirs a question rose,
That stirred-up strife will never close—
What rank of all the ransomed race,
Owes highest praise to sovereign grace?”*

Babes there caught from womb and breast,

*Claimed right to sing above the rest,
Because they found the happy shore,
They never saw nor sought before."*

What distinguishing grace is that which called us when we were young! Here is electing love. "When Ephraim was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." Some of us in time and in eternity will have to utter a special song of thankfulness to the love which took us in our days of folly and simplicity, and conducted us into the family of God. It was not because we were better disposed children than others, or because there was naturally anything good about us—we were willful, heady, and high-minded, proud, wayward, and disobedient as other children are—and yet mercy separated us from the rest, and we shall never cease to adore its sovereignty.

Look at the grace which calls the man at the age of twenty, when the passions are hot, when there is strong temptation to plunge into the vices and the so-called pleasures of life. To be delivered from the charms of sin, when the world's cheek is ruddy, when it wears its best attire, and to be taught to prefer the reproach of Christ to all the riches of Egypt—this is mighty grace for which God shall have our sweetest song.

To be called of the Lord at forty, in the prime of life. This is a wonderful instance of divine power, for worldliness is hard to overcome, and worldliness is the sin of middle age. With a family about you, with much business, with the world eating into you as does a canker, it is a wonder that God should in His mercy have visited you then, and made you a regenerate soul. You are a miracle of grace, and you will have to feel it and to praise God for it in time and eternity.

Sixty, again. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If so, then you who are accustomed to do evil may learn to do well." And yet you have learned, you have had a blessed schoolmaster who sweetly taught you, and you have learned to do well. Though your vessel had begun to rot in the waters of the Black Sea of sin, you have got a new owner, and you will run up a new flag, and you will sail round the Cape of Good Hope to the Islands of the Blessed, in the Land of the Hereafter.

But what shall I say of you who are called when you are aged? Ah, you will have to love much, for you have had much forgiven. I do not know that you may be in thankfulness a whit behind those of us who are called in our early youth. We have much to bless God for, and so have you. We are at one extreme and you are at the other. We would love much because we have been spared much sinning, and you must love much because you have been delivered from much sinning. Not to go through the fire is a theme for song, but to traverse the flame and not be burned, to walk the furnace and to be delivered from its vehement fire, oh! how should you find words with which to express your gratitude!

Called early or called late, called at midday or called at early noon, let us together, since we have been called by grace alone, ascribe it all to the Lord Jesus, and moved by the mighty constraints of His love, let us work with body, soul, and spirit—work for Him till we can work no longer, and then praise Him in the rest of glory.

I pray you, brethren, suffer no idleness to creep over you. If you have sought to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, do it more. Give more, talk more of Christ, pray more, labor more! I often receive the kind advice, "Do less." I cannot do less. Do less! Why, better rot altogether than live the inglorious life of doing less than our utmost for God. We shall none of us, I am afraid, kill ourselves with working too hard for Jesus. It were such a blessed act of suicide that if there be a sin that is venial, it would certainly be that. I am not afraid that you are likely to perpetrate such an enormity.

Work for the Master! Labor for the Master! We must spend and be spent, and wear ourselves out for Him! Make no reserve for the flesh to fulfill the lusts of it! And oh, how happy shall we be if we may be privileged to finish the work, and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

May the Lord bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 19:27-30. 20:1-29.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.